

Lincoln p. 263. - 273, W. O. Stoddard.

Published Monthly. Volume 138. Number 3.

SIXTY-NINTH YEAR.

Kavanaugh
THE

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

EDITED BY ALLEN THORNDIKE RICE.

March, 1884.

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| I. Is our Civilization Perishable? | Judge J. A. JAMESON. |
| II. Agricultural Politics in England | WILLIAM E. BEAR. |
| III. A Defenseless Sea-Board | Gen. H. A. SMALLEY. |
| IV. Neither Genius nor Martyr | ALICE HYNEMAN RHINE. |
| V. The Story of a Nomination | W. O. STODDARD. |
| VI. Literary Resurrectionists | CHARLES T. CONGDON. |
| VII. How to Improve the Mississippi | ROBERT S. TAYLOR. |
| VIII. The Constitutionality of Repudiation . . | { D. H. CHAMBERLAIN.
JOHN S. WISE, M. C. |

NEW YORK:

No. 30 LAFAYETTE PLACE.

LONDON: THE AMERICAN EXCHANGE. PARIS: THE GALIGNANI LIBRARY.
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MELBOURNE: W. ROBERTSON. YOKOHAMA AND SHANGHAI: KELLY & WALSH.

Single number, Fifty Cents. Yearly subscription, Five Dollars.

Entered at the Post-Office at New York, and admitted for transmission through the mails as second-class matter.



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THE STORY OF A NOMINATION.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN is now regarded as having possessed at each successive stage of his presidential career, if not before it began, the all but unanimous and enthusiastic love and confidence of his "Union-loving" fellow-citizens. All patriotism and all devotion to the cause of the Union is popularly believed to have stood by him unswervingly. It seems to many even painful to measure the position he occupied prior to the final triumph of his administration, otherwise than by the grand majorities of his second election, supplemented by the frantic grief which surged around his coffin. Almost forgotten is the long struggle for the constitutional supremacy of the civil authority over the military. So are the dissensions and disaffections in the Republican party; so are the bitter, personal animosities of which Mr. Lincoln was the object. A better memory of all these things, and a more perfect historical record of them, would be better justice to him.

The animosities against Mr. Lincoln were of various origin. A noteworthy characteristic of many, and these not by any means the least important or offensive, was that they were not without strong apparent cause. They temporarily embittered the souls and affected the conduct of men who were true and faithful citizens, willing to make any sacrifice, even of life itself, to the cause and country to which they were devoted. It is worth while to ascertain some of the methods, seen or unseen at the time, by which animosities so bitter and disaffections so strong were rendered innocuous. It is well to know why they failed to assume such shape as to prevent Mr. Lincoln's second nomination and triumphant reëlection.

There is no character of modern times better worth studying than that of Abraham Lincoln. A thoughtful reading of his record sometimes impels to the mental inquiry: "Was this man

a prophet? Did he foresee these things, that he was ever so well prepared to meet their coming?" He was no prophet, and his foresight was of a nature peculiar to his own genius. In the deepest and highest signification of a much misused word, he was a "politician," including in that term all that may be meant or conveyed by its inferior synonym, "statesman." He was a born leader of men, and his natural faculties had been trained and developed in every grade and department of the great school provided for him. He received a full half century of varied preparation for the work at last put into his hands as President of the United States during civil war and revolution. One strongly marked natural characteristic was left, profitably undisturbed, through all the processes of his toilsome and painful education. This characteristic found its expression in the fact that he never studied himself, morbidly, nor experienced any especial anxiety as to his own inner motives. He was keenly conscious, always, of the possession of uncommon powers, but, being nearly destitute of self-analysis, he continually exercised those powers in an unconsciousness of either their degree or the methods of their operation. He did many great things, hardly aware that they were great, and not much troubling himself to discover or to precisely define why he did them. Such causes of action as, from time to time, he both thoughtfully sought out and publicly declared, were always external to himself and to his personal interests, and their expression included no obtrusive analysis of his mental processes.

Mr. Lincoln did hardly anything with an intention of thereby assuring his second nomination, but he did many things, and helped in the doing of others, which unintentionally operated to bring it about. Beyond a doubt, there were political as well as military reasons, but none of them personal to Mr. Lincoln, for the removal of General George B. McClellan from the command of the Army of the Potomac, in November, 1862. That the military reasons were sufficient to the mind of the President, and that these only were publicly defined and declared, proves but one thing,—that he was dealing then with the political "present" only. He went no further into the political future than to discern, very acutely, that there was one, and that he must both expect and prepare for it.

There were many reasons, politically, why the removal of General McClellan, at such a time and in such a manner, must

have at least one assured and permanent effect. It predestined the removed General to be the Democratic candidate in the next presidential campaign, around whom all the scattered forces of the multifarious opposition could and did rally. More than that, it entered him for the presidential race, in advance, with the chances for success apparently strongly in his favor, provided for him by the Republican Administration. If the vote which was finally taken in the autumn of the year 1864, could have been taken in the fall of 1862, instead, he surely would have been elected over Mr. Lincoln, or over any other possible Republican candidate, as a study of the election returns of the latter year will convince any political student.

A secondary effect of General McClellan's removal, and one which was related to its first effect, was plainly perceptible at the time. This was that Mr. Lincoln's prospect for a second nomination by his party, already painfully small, had by his own act been sensibly diminished, however wisely for the public interests or however conscientiously he had acted. In this and in other ways, as if reckless of all results to himself, he had for the time almost destroyed his political availability. So far as General McClellan was concerned, the effect produced was sufficiently lasting to secure his eventual nomination. The adverse effect upon Mr. Lincoln was speedily followed by a partial reaction; but this operated slowly. It required to be supplemented and aided by other causes, among which came, in due season, the victory at Gettysburg, the surrender of Vicksburg, and the other military successes of the years 1863 and 1864.

Mr. Lincoln had unintentionally performed, in advance, an important task nominally belonging to the next Democratic National Convention. He had selected its presidential candidate. He had thereby done nothing, however, to facilitate the work of the next National Convention of the Republican party.

When, at last, the two great party congresses met and acted, it was made to appear, and the people generally supposed at the time, and have since believed, that the action of both alike was perfunctory, automatic, and unobstructed. This was true of the Democratic body, beyond a doubt, but not of the Republican. The renomination of Abraham Lincoln, inevitable as it seemed to many, was neither spontaneous nor unanimous, nor was it obtained without active and determined opposition. The work

of the Republican National Convention at Baltimore, in the year 1864, was indeed transacted for it beforehand, but not in any manner so public and open as had been the formal transfer of General George B. McClellan from the command of the Army of the Potomac to the unquestioned leadership of the Democratic party.

For some years before the war, and during its entire continuance, the conspiracy which prepared and produced the Rebellion operated effectively, both at the North and at the South, through affiliated secret organizations. These covered the latter section like a fine net-work, and their ramifications penetrated the Free States in every part. At the South, also, under the terrible oppression that crushed them, the colored men and the Union-loving white men formed secret associations. These were more or less local in their scope and extent, but were provided with all the customary appliances for mutual intercommunication. No loyal secret societies or affiliations worth mentioning were organized at the North until early in the year 1862. At that time, signs of movements in this direction began to appear, and wise men at Washington seized eagerly the idea of a consolidation, centralization, and general extension of an agency so promising. Meetings of some of these men were held in a room of the Department of the Interior. At one of these meetings a full plan of operation was perfected, a name was adopted, and the Union League of America was born of a unanimous vote of less than a score of men. "Councils" were formed at once all over the city of Washington, and these almost instantly swarmed with members. Paid agents were forthwith sent out over the North to organize councils everywhere. These agents were instructed to preserve, as much as possible, in each community, the idea of local spontaneity. As a consequence of this, there are not wanting, at this day, towns and cities which fondly preserve a local tradition of being the birthplace of the Union League.

A central committee of twelve was chosen, and was named "The Grand Council." It elected grand officers, and was to be in perpetual session at Washington, and to it the several State grand councils and all the traveling agents duly reported. Precisely how much personal interest in this movement was taken by the President of the United States, could only be gathered from stenographic reports of his frequent consultations with the

late Hon. J. M. Edmunds, Commissioner of the General Land Office and President of the Grand Council of the Union League. There were other men with whom Mr. Lincoln may have conversed upon the subject, for the Grand Council of twelve was largely made up of his immediate personal friends.

Severe as were the losses and reverses of the South up to the month of July, 1863, and admirable as had been the conduct of national affairs by the Lincoln Administration, under its measureless difficulties, the people of the North seemed to discern in the course of events little more than one continuous disaster, whereof they were paying the enormous cost in blood and money. Even the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg and Port Hudson, in that month, did but call forth enthusiasm for Meade and Grant and their armies. Among successful commanders, as well as among distinguished civilians, political prophets already began to search for a probable successor to the alleged presidential failure who must yet for a season linger in the White House. They were really doing Mr. Lincoln's candidacy no harm in this. Not knowing it, they were subjecting him to the tremendous ordeal of a daily and hourly comparison with all other men—man by man—with reference to his and their several fitnesses and capacities.

There was also this against him, momentarily, but sure at last to be counted in his favor, that much could be credited to others which of right belonged to him; that the faults and failures of many others could be charged upon him; that he stood up where no square inch of him could be hidden from his critics; while of the men with whom he was compared very little more than specimens of their best work could be obtained or presented for analysis.

There was to be a general or national "Grand Council" of the Union League in the course of the summer of 1863. It was to be held in the city of Washington, and was to consist of representative delegates from every corner of the country; but the outside world knew very little about it, either before or after its assembling. Very little indeed is known about it to this day, and yet it did a deal of preparatory work for the Republican National Convention of 1864. When the Grand Council of delegates came together it was a notable body of men. It was a Union League Congress, containing many of the Senators and representative members of the Constitutional Congress of the

United States. It also contained hot-headed and free-tongued representatives of every faction of the Republican party inimical to Mr. Lincoln.

Particularly bitter were the souls of the delegations from Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, as a result of the political and military complications of affairs in those communities. To them the President was imaged, and in their speeches they presented him, as a selfish and heartless tyrant, regardless of their interests, and governing them through ignorant and merciless military "satraps," whose conduct was a disgrace to the nation and a curse to a miserable, downtrodden multitude. A crowded hall listened, in secrecy and silence, to the eloquent and bitter indictment of the Administration in general and the President in particular. During all the earlier hours of the stormy meeting not a voice was raised in Mr. Lincoln's defense, and the convention, or Grand Council, seemed to be swept away by the tide. This was more an appearance than a reality, for the tide was overdoing and exhausting itself by its own vehemence, and preparing for a turn. There was a good deal of "undertow" all the while. At last the grand corresponding secretary took the stand. He was no orator, and he was too red-hot angry to speak well or "eloquently." He was able to show, however, and very conclusively, that the outlines and many details of Mr. Lincoln's action in the several States and localities covered by this part of the general indictment against him, had been particularly advised, counseled, and urged by the representative men of those States and localities, and notably by some of the very men who now, with closed doors, were abusing him for following their own advice. It was very simple indeed, but it was a somewhat stunning defense. It was met by no reply whatever, for there seemed to be none to make. The tide turned as if by magic. The Grand Council adopted, without further debate, but not by any means unanimously, a resolution cordially indorsing the Administration and the President. To this was added another resolution of great moment, for it embraced a clause providing that the next annual Grand Council of the Union League should be summoned to meet at the same time and place with the National Convention of the Republican party for the nomination of presidential candidates.

The Council adjourned, and, as its members drifted slowly out of the hall, United States Senator James H. Lane, of Kansas,

who had been a severe critic of Mr. Lincoln at the beginning of the evening's oratory, approached the corresponding secretary, and holding out his hand, remarked : " You've made at least one convert. I'll stand by Old Abe through thick and thin, after this." That he had been thoroughly converted proved to be of importance, about a year later.

The subsequent course of military and political affairs, at home and abroad, is beyond the scope of this paper; but the Union League grew and prospered until it became the civil "home guard" of the armies in the field. Many forces acted and reacted, both for and against a renomination of President Lincoln. His hold upon the Republican party, as such, had been even weakened by the fact that immediately upon his first election he had ceased to be a partisan, and had appointed to posts of honor and power Democrats and Republicans alike.

The full effect of the Emancipation Proclamation had not yet been obtained. His "reconstruction" policy had gained him more foes than friends. He was carrying the full burden of the Draft Act, the National Bank system, the increasing taxation, the national weariness, and the sore-hearted craving for the peace which seemed still so far away.

The names of several able and distinguished Republicans in military and civil life were openly brought forward in connection with the coming nomination. Among these was the name of General John C. Fremont, and at last a small, "independent" convention, held at Cleveland, Ohio, actually nominated him, upon a platform which set forth causes of dissatisfaction with Mr. Lincoln. The General accepted the nomination. Other elements of discontent within the party began to rally and take form around the eminently fit and suitable name of Hon. S. P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury. Newspaper editors here and there swung out the name of General Grant, as a strictly "war candidate," and other available successors to Mr. Lincoln were freely and generally discussed. There were many "one-term" men, and many more uneasy souls, as usual, who favored a change for the sake of change. The prospect for a peaceable and sober-minded convention became small indeed, while any other sort would be a sure preparation for defeat at the November polls.

Mr. Lincoln did nothing at all to favor himself in the matter. The obnoxious draft of men for the army went on as usual. The unpopular features of his reconstruction policy were adhered

to with iron firmness. Not one man was appointed to or removed from office with any reference to the action of the Baltimore Convention. Nevertheless, it is not to be supposed for one moment that the President was indifferent to the question of a second term of office and of national approval or disapproval of his administration of public affairs. It is not to be imagined that he did not feel deeply, keenly, bitterly, the multiplied stabs and stings inflicted upon him. He could not willingly, no, not without a broken heart, have laid aside, half done, the mighty task which had been given him. He knew well, and often said, that its toil and trouble were killing him and its weight was crushing him. He was well assured, and more than once declared, that he must die under it; but his life was in it, and at last was taken from him with its ending. It is to his honor and not to his disparagement that he earnestly desired a second term; but he was above seeking the coveted result by any unworthy means.

The President could not have been unaware of the fact that the Grand Council of the Union League had been called to meet at Baltimore. He could not but have felt a deep and anxious interest in its character and action. His friends daily came to see him at the White House, and they very frankly told him of all discernible clouds and doubts that were shadowing the prospect. Among them, and only a few days before the sitting of the convention, came Senator "Jim" Lane, of Kansas. The conference with him was somewhat protracted, but there was no reporter present. Precisely what may have passed in that interview is mere matter of conjecture; but it is not possible that, at such a time, the most important event of the immediate future failed of attention and discussion.

The Republican National Convention was called to meet on the 8th day of June, 1864, in the city of Baltimore, and an enormous "wigwam" had been constructed for the accommodation of its expected throng of delegates and spectators. The National Grand Council of the Union League had been summoned to meet at Baltimore, on the evening of June 7, 1864, and a large hall had been provided for its assembling. It was to have no "audience," and therefore needed less room than was required by it in its other form as the "Convention." There were many members of each body who were not also members of the other, but at least two-thirds of the delegates to the

Grand Council were also delegates to the Convention. They constituted a clear majority of the latter body as to mere numbers, and vastly more than a majority as to personal character, weight, leadership, and control. The National Convention, therefore, actually met first in the hall of the Union League. The Grand Council assembled at an early hour, and its doors were sternly closed to all but those with absolute right to enter. The Grand Council was a dignifiedly simple gathering. There were no press-reporters present. No brass band made music. No time was wasted in preliminary or other organization, and no committees were required. The ample platform contained only three men,—the grand president and the grand recording and corresponding secretaries. There was all the more time for the transaction of business, and this began the moment that the meeting was called to order. There had been both preparation and consultation among the intending assailants of the Administration. They arose to speak, in rapid but not in conflicting succession, in different parts of the hall. Perhaps the severest attack upon the President and the conduct of the war was made by one of the then United States Senators from Missouri; but there were others whom he but little surpassed in vehemence. The charges made were appalling, and it was well that their eloquent utterance was to form no part of the published proceedings of the Baltimore Convention. Had they been openly uttered in the convention, to go forth to the country, whether they were true or false, that body could afterward have reached no peaceful agreement by ballot, nor could it have adopted any platform of resolutions upon which it could have placed Abraham Lincoln before the people as a candidate for the presidency. There were not many faults possible to a ruler of a free people whereof Mr. Lincoln was not accused, before the excited patriots made an end of their “speeches for the prosecution” of the public criminal whose course in office they were denouncing.

Once more it seemed as if a rising tide were sweeping all before it. Not a voice had yet been raised in defense of Mr. Lincoln. This may have been, in part, for lack of opportunity. The grand president, Judge Edmunds, was a devoted friend of Mr. Lincoln, and yet, as if with malice aforethought, he sat there behind his desk on the raised platform, calmly “recognizing,” as presiding officer of the Grand Council, only the known

enemies of his friend, until it seemed as if most of them must have been heard.

There came a lull in the storm, and "Jim" Lane of Kansas arose, near the front, in the middle aisle of the hall. He was instantly recognized by the chairman; but he stood in silence for a moment, until he had deliberately turned around and looked all over the room. The substance of his remarks was nearly as follows:

"Mr. President, Gentlemen of the Grand Council: For a man to produce pain in another man by pressing upon a wounded spot requires no great degree of strength, and he who presses is not entitled to any emotion of triumph at the agony expressed by the sufferer. Neither skill nor wisdom has been exercised in the barbaric process. For a man, an orator, to produce an effect upon sore and weary hearts, gangrened with many hurts, worn out with many sacrifices, sick with long delays, broken with bitter disappointments; so stirring them up, even to passion and to folly, demands no high degree of oratorical ability. It is an easy thing to do, as we have seen this evening. Almost anybody can do it.

"For a man to take such a crowd as this now is, so sore and sick at heart and now so stung and aroused to passionate folly; now so infused with a delusive hope for the future as well as with false and unjust thoughts concerning the past; for a man to address himself to such an assembly and turn the tide of its passion and its excitement in the opposite direction; that were a task worthy of the highest, greatest effort of human oratory. I am no orator at all, but to precisely that task have I now set myself, with absolute certainty of success. All that is needful is that the truth should be set forth plainly, now that the false has done its worst."

He had gained in a minute all that could be won by an audacity bordering upon arrogance. Rapid and vivid sketches followed, presenting in detail the leading features of the history of Mr. Lincoln's administration. Each was made complete in itself, and at the end of each chapter came some variation of this formula:

"I am speaking individually to each man here. Do you, sir, know, in this broad land, and can you name to me, one man whom you could or would trust, before God, that he would have done better in this matter than Abraham Lincoln has done, and to whom you would be more willing to intrust the unforeseen emergency or peril which is next to come? That unforeseen peril, that perplexing emergency, that step in the dark, is right before us, and we are here to decide by whom it shall be made for the nation. Name your other man!"

Very little time was wasted upon the general list of charges, for they had spent themselves in the making; but a masterly

picture of Mr. Lincoln's long-suffering, patience, faithful toil, utter unselfishness, and of the great advances already gained under his leadership, was followed by a sudden transfer of the thoughts of all to the scene in the great wigwam on the morrow.

"We shall come together to be watched, in breathless listening, by all this country,—by all the civilized world,—and if we shall seem to waver as to our set purpose, we destroy hope; and if we permit private feeling, as to-night, to break forth into discussion, we discuss defeat; and if we nominate any other man than Abraham Lincoln we nominate ruin! Gentlemen of the Grand Council of the Union League, I have done."

The Senator sat down, but no man arose to reply. His speech had not been a very long one, but it had been enough to accomplish all he had proposed for it. The resolution approving the Administration was adopted with but few dissenting voices, many not voting. Another vote declared the voice of the Union League to be in favor of President Lincoln's reëlection, and the greatest political peril then threatening the United States had disappeared. When the National Convention of the Republican party attained an organized condition on the next day, Abraham Lincoln was nominated for President on the first ballot. The twenty-two votes of Missouri were first given for General Grant, but were immediately changed to Mr. Lincoln, and the voice of the convention for him was declared to be unanimous. Thirty days later it would have been a hard task to find a man who would confess to having ever entertained a doubt as to that result; but then the delegates to the Grand Council were not in a position to make remarks or to answer questions.

W. O. STODDARD.

